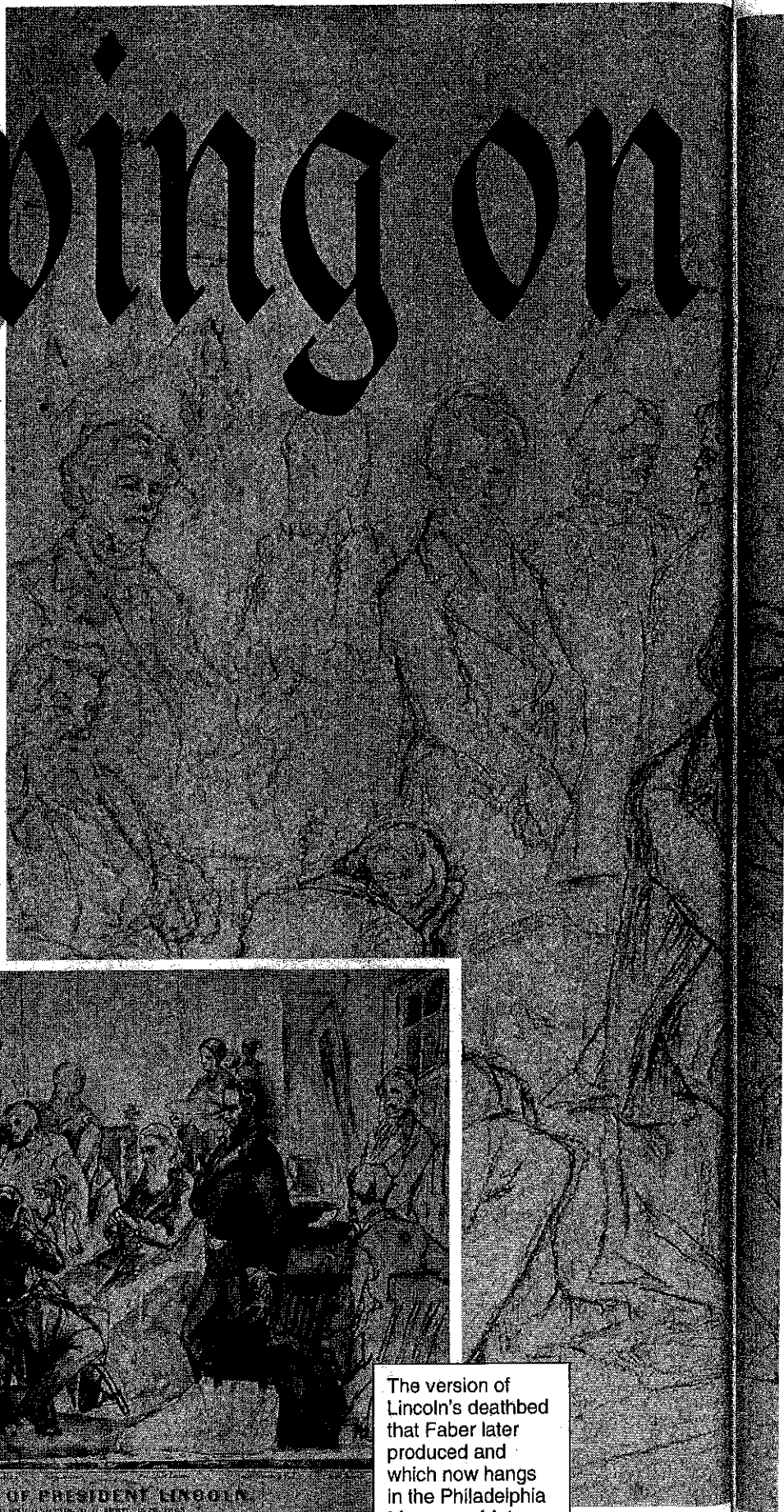


Drawing on

By Mike Rhode

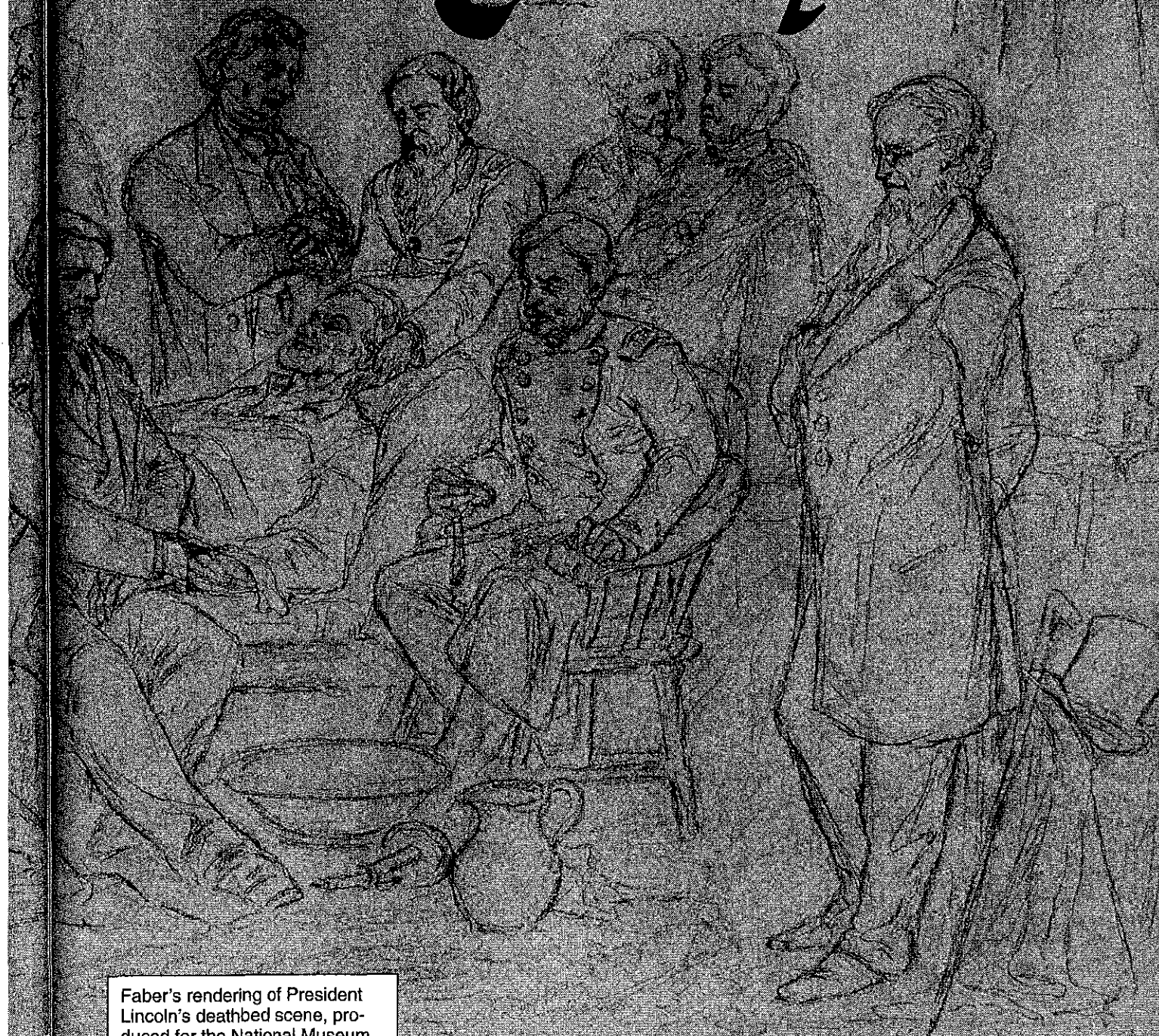
Just as hammering one nail doesn't make one a carpenter, so the old joke goes, neither does drawing one cartoon qualify one as a cartoonist. Hermann Faber without a doubt would not have considered himself a cartoonist, as he is now acknowledged as one of the founders of the medical-illustration profession. But the sole cartoon he produced, and later re-created, came during and as a result of American's bloodiest period, the Civil War.

In April 1862, Dr. William Hammond had been appointed the Union Army's surgeon general after his predecessor, Dr. Thomas Lawson, resigned over differences with the autocratic Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. Lawson had held the post since 1836, and his deputy, Dr. Clement Finley, filled in for less than a year before Hammond's appointment. Neither man had remotely prepared the Army's medical corps for the coming war. In May



The version of Lincoln's deathbed that Faber later produced and which now hangs in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Tragedy



Faber's rendering of President Lincoln's deathbed scene, produced for the National Museum of Health and Medicine.

1862 Hammond founded the Army Medical Museum, and that August he appointed Dr. John Brinton, a surgeon, as the museum's curator and Joseph Woodward as Brinton's assistant.

Brinton and Hammond shared a trait: They were inexhaustible in the search for improved medical knowledge. To that end, Brinton undertook the grisly but scientifically rewarding task of scouring the battlefields for specimens. (In a war that cost more than 550,000 lives, finding them was unfortunately not a problem.) He and Woodward compiled the information into the *Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion*, with Brinton writing the surgical material while Woodward produced the medical and disease sections. When they finished the work in the late 1880s, their research sprawled over six volumes and more than 6,000 pages. Once he began work on his section of the *History*, Brinton hired a staff of artists, enlisting them as hospital stewards and assigning them to military duty in the surgeon general's office. In this capacity Faber joined the museum's staff and produced many illustrations for the museum, mostly for Woodward's medical section of the *History*.

Faber's path to Washington, D.C., was a long and indirect one: Born in Germany on January 26, 1832, he studied illustration at the University of Giessen and emigrated to Philadelphia, where he married in 1853. He supported his family by producing anatomical illustrations until he joined Brinton and the museum in 1863.

In 1864 Brinton was abruptly relieved of his duties at the museum. Despite his medical qualifications, politics played a

Drawing on Tragedy

role in his dismissal, with several factors against him: He was a Hammond appointee, and Hammond

had been court-martialed over purchasing Army blankets outside the usual channels (Stanton's dislike of him didn't help his case); he was a cousin of George McClellan (the discredited Union general and failed presidential candidate); and he was the proponent of a controversial and unpopular plan to retain volunteer surgeons equal in rank to the career Army surgeons after war's end.

Faber's sole cartoon concerned Brinton's reassignment to normal medical duties. In his autobiography, Brinton recalls

the circumstances surrounding the cartoon's elements:

I had been a long time in Washington, and had many friends. To some of these, I said good-bye, and to one of them, Mrs. Stephen A. Douglas, I sent a picture. I had often joked with her when officers had been sent away from Washington under the displeasure of the Secretary of War,—exiled, in fact, for the Secretary looked upon a detail to Louisville or St. Louis as a banishment, quite as in Russia they regard banishment to Siberia. Some officers took removal from Washington as a rather hard fate, but I had often told Mrs. Douglas that I was sure to be decapitated, but that when it came, like St. Denis (she, Mrs. Douglas, was a Catholic), I would lose my head with good grace. So I requested one of the

artists of the Museum, Faber, a German of facile pencil, to make a pen-and-ink sketch of myself as St. Denis leaving the Museum, head in hand, for the region of the setting sun, with the bloody headman's sword, the unfinished work of the Surgical History of the War, etc.



Faber's caricature of Dr. John Brinton after Brinton's "exile" from the Army Medical Museum.

Brinton bestowed Faber's resulting cartoon on Mrs. Douglas as a gift (no one knows if the original yet exists).

The cartoon that today's historian can view—the one accompanying this article—is Faber's own re-creation of his first effort. Brinton recalled in his autobiography that Dr. Joseph K. Barnes, the new surgeon general, had heard of Faber's cartoon and asked to see it. Woodward persuaded Faber to redraw it from memory. According to Brinton, he sensed the classically versed Woodward's involvement in the motto *Si tacuisses Philosophus mansisses* (from *Dante's Inferno*): "O if you had been silent, you would have then remained a philosopher."

Barnes gave Faber's second original to Secretary Stanton and, like its predecessor, its whereabouts are unknown.

Faber produced one other drawing of historical significance: a pencil drawing of President Abraham Lincoln's deathbed. Lincoln had lain unconscious for several hours, and eventually died, in a boarding house across the street from Ford's Theatre, where John Wilkes Booth assassinated him. Faber was

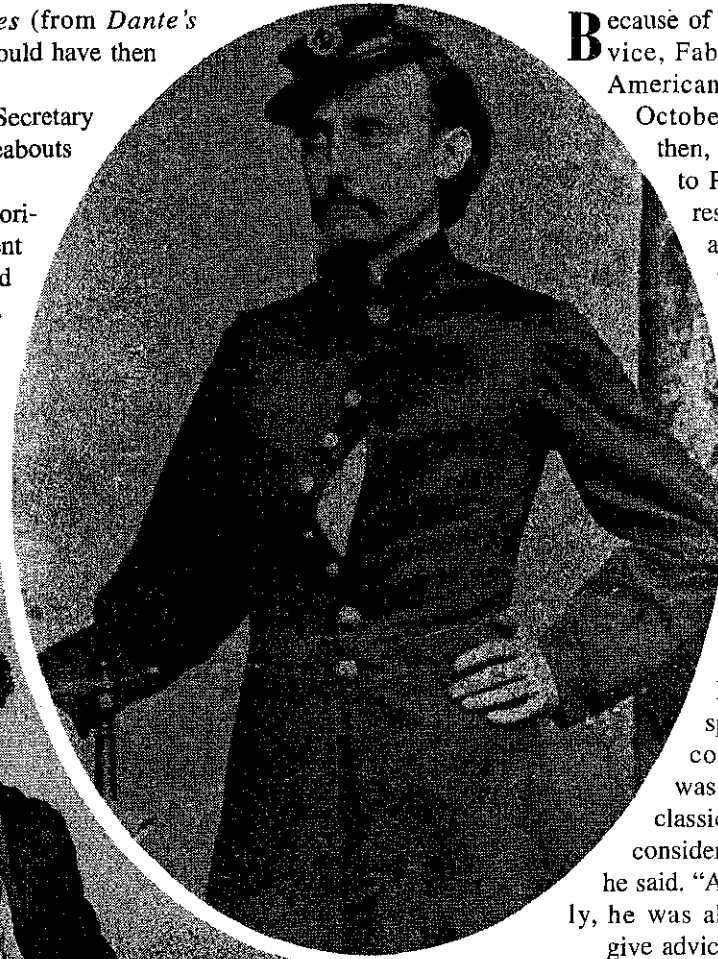
Drawing on Tragedy

the doctors attending Lincoln after he was shot, and he approved Faber's drawing for its accuracy. Of all the versions of Lincoln's deathbed, Faber was the only one drawing from the scene. Like his St. Denis cartoon, Faber produced a second version of this work that now hangs in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

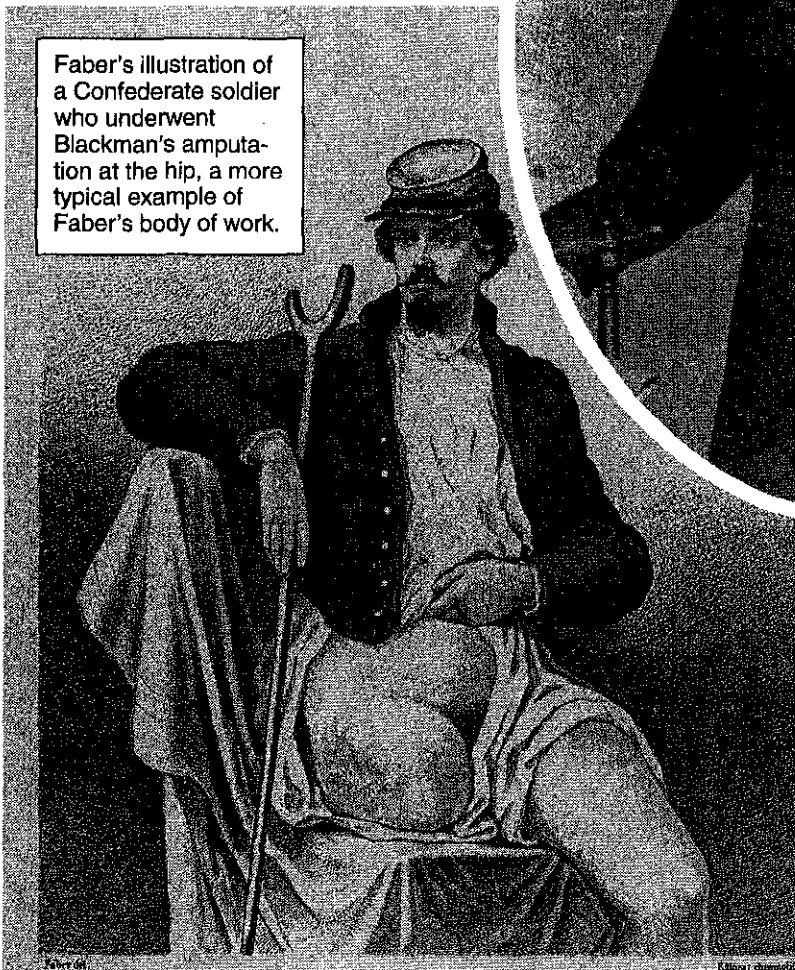
Because of his military service, Faber was granted American citizenship on October 31, 1868. By then, he had returned to Philadelphia and resumed his career as a medical illustrator, and he instructed two of his sons in the trade. In his twilight years he taught medical illustration. According to one of his colleagues, the etcher J. L. G. Ferris, Faber spent these years contentedly. "He was a master of the classical line and had considerable erudition," he said. "Affable and kindly, he was always ready to give advice to the student. He had short shrift, however, for the lazy or insincere worker."

Toward the end of Faber's life, America had begun to put the Civil War behind herself and began assuming a less provincial and more global perspective. When Faber died on December 10, 1913, the United States stood at the precipice of a war with Germany—Faber's homeland.

The isolated nonmedical illustrations Faber produced were the result of great national traumas: the United States tearing itself apart and its president being slain. Though history has largely overlooked Faber, his artwork is an interesting stitch in the fabric of American history. ■



Hermann Faber, circa 1865.



Faber's illustration of a Confederate soldier who underwent Blackman's amputation at the hip, a more typical example of Faber's body of work.

BLACKMAN'S SUCCESSFUL AMPUTATION AT THE HIP JOINT